

Postscripts

By JACK POST

January is here to stay, 31 days of it, almost certainly colder than that rather mild December that we enjoyed to a certain extent. Probably snow will fall, for it usually does in January, and if it does those who are joggers could get their exercise on skis or snowshoes, or just plodding through the drifts. If, on the other hand, the ground stays bare, we can all walk, and Duxbury is blessed with every variety of walking territory that any of us could desire.

First and most rugged is the beach. You get the east wind there, bone chilling at this season even if you seek the shelter of the lee side of the dunes, but starkly beautiful none the less, with a chance to see ducks and geese and of course the inevitable seagulls; but go prepared with gloves and a wool cap and a heavy windbreaker. Even then you could be uncomfortable.

More fun are some of the inland trails ranging from old logging roads, to Indian paths, to access roads for cranberry bogs, but there are lots of them through the woods and over the back hills, wild enough to give you a good long hike without ever seeing a house, sometimes through forest, sometimes past fields and swamps. If there's been a cold snap, all sorts of new possibilities open up for exploring marshes and streams impossible to penetrate until zero weather guarantees thick enough ice for a secluded exploration of otherwise impenetrable wilderness. Find your old skates in the back of the closet, for if we do have a cold snap this month, nothing is more fun than sliding over black ice, looking down at the waving grass beneath your feet, or ahead at the islands and estuaries opening before you.

For a first walk, try going in to the North Hills Marsh area, also known as Malachi Brook, which can be approached from several different directions, off Mayflower St. beyond the dump, for instance, where you can leave your car and follow one of the several wood roads east, either in the Town Forest, or a little further on, on the Audubon property. In the latter, you soon come to the pond itself which you can approach through a lovely wooded knoll, quietly if the water is still open (not likely at this season), because this is a favorite spot for mallards and black duck, sometimes wood duck, and occasionally geese, who come in for fresh water and inland delicacies in a shallow pond.

You can continue around the north side of the pond, picking your way with some difficulty for a few hundred yards where the roads do not connect, until you reach the cranberry bogs which have access paths to West St. If you choose the south side of North Hill Marsh, you start at the cranberry bog, through the woods to the right just beyond the town dump. Here are several wild trails, one leading up the steep hill to the south of the pond and eventually out to the golf course. A side trip would follow the trail out onto the wooded point jutting into the pond.

Walking fairly steadily, you could make it from Mayflower to West St. (or vice versa) in about an hour, which would be more than an easy afternoon's diversion. A pleasant variation would be to walk west from Mayflower, over Duxbury Rural & Historical Society land to Round Pond, then south toward Island Creek Pond, and back up its northern shore to Mayflower again. Quite a few houses have been built recently in this area, so you won't find the solitude of the North Hills area, but even so, this is lovely country.

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To add some zest to your explorations, re-read the chapter in Dorothy Wentworth's "Settlement & Growth of Duxbury" covering Highways and Byways. You will find a map opposite page 16 showing the old Duxbury paths superimposed on present-day roads. But some of these branch off into the woods and you can really test your powers of observation and inventiveness to pick out and follow where the Green Harbor Path of 1623 ran, and where it intersected the Old Path from Pembroke. That Green Harbor Path, incidentally, plunges into the woods off the Duxbury end of Careswell St., crosses the Old Colony roadbed (itself a fascinating walk) and comes out not too far from the Daniel Webster farm site in Marshfield. Up from the roadbed onto the plateau above the track was deep-cut by the Pilgrims and their animals. There you literally walk in the footsteps of history.

Once you have studied the old paths in Dorothy Wentworth's account, you can quite easily transpose them onto the U.S. Geodetic Survey contour map of the Duxbury sector. This shows every track, all the ponds, swamps and hills, even the houses as tiny dots, though not up to date with recent developments. Carry this with you, and you can walk along paths that will lead you back into the past, a thrilling experience that could transform January into a month of promise and reward.